

Assembly Rejects Lawmaker's Request for Sand Mining Info

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Link: <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/assembly-rejects-lawmakers-request-for-sand-mining-info-133142/>

Opposition lawmaker Son Chhay's request for clarity on Cambodia's sand trade will not be forwarded to Mines and Energy Minister Suy Sem because it does not comply with National Assembly rules, a parliamentary spokesman said on Tuesday.

Mr. Chhay said the rejection seemed to defy the Constitution. Parliament "cannot behave like the puppet of the executive," he said.

In the letter signed on Monday and addressed to Mr. Sem, Mr. Chhay requested information on policy changes related to the sand trade, which critics have linked to environmental destruction and government corruption.

He asked the minister to clarify state policies related to the amount of sand that can be extracted from rivers, and what procedures were in place to ensure that a ban on coastal sand exports, first put in place in November, would be enforced.

Mr. Chhay also asked the government to end the mining of sand from estuaries in Koh Kong province, including the removal of sand mining equipment and a sand-washing facility.

In response, National Assembly spokesman Leng Peng Long said the letter improperly cited Constitutional articles 69 and 96, neither of which were pertinent to the request, so Assembly President Heng Samrin had decided not to forward the letter to the minister.

Article 69 has to do with culture and Khmer language and was therefore irrelevant, he said, while Article 96, which allows lawmakers to demand explanations of government officials, required direct questions that Mr. Chhay's letter did not provide.

"His request didn't understand the law and was so messy," Mr. Peng Long said.

Article 96 makes no mention of the formatting of lawmakers' requests and does not explicitly empower the Assembly president to deny them, saying only they should be submitted in writing and that "explanations shall be provided within 7 days after the day when the question is received."

Mr. Chhay said that he had not received an official response from the Assembly and could alter his letter if it truly failed to comply with rules, though he doubted it did.

"I never encountered this kind of rejection before," he said.

Mr. Chhay has written three previous requests over the past several months—a previous sand-related query, another to the Commerce Ministry and a third to the Culture Ministry—all of which had been forwarded to the appropriate minister, but went unanswered, he said.

"If Cambodia is still [working under] democratic principles...then one way or the other, the people who do not do their duty responsibly will be punished," he said.

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